

PA on the PA

by CPT Robert W. Jenkins

During the day, CPT Ron Carden manages the Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP) for the entire United States Army and Army Reserves. However, by night he can occasionally be found fulfilling his hobby and passion, singing and performing. He has been performing since he was 5 years old and has twice the years of experience on stage, doubling more than his 13 years of Army service. *"My parents took me to a musical variety show. I slipped away while they were watching the show and next thing they knew I was on stage performing."* *"I went back stage and told the band that I could sing and dance."* *"They said to show them, so I did."* *"They introduced me and soon after I got my first standing ovation."* *"I was hooked."* - Carden says of his introduction to performing. Ron has had some unique exposure and influence as a youth in the music arena. At the age of 12 he worked part-time as a dressing room assistant for musicians like Conway Twitty, Willie Nelson and Charlie Daniels. As a teenager Ron was quite successful singing in school. He is the only person to have won thirteen 1st place medals in one year at the Indiana High School Music Association competition. He competed as a soloist, in a jazz choir, madrigals, boy's choir, show choir, and was the only male in a girl's choir. His vocal range went from singing 1st bass in the boy's choir to male alto in the girl's choir. He was awarded a plaque for being the "Most Promising Actor and Musician", by his High School's Arts Department. Not only has singing and performing provided him with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction, he discovered his future wife in the process. Ron met and started dating his wife Kari in seventh grade during a trip to perform for Martha Lane Collins, then Governor of Kentucky. Belting out tunes and crooning for audiences hasn't always been good for him either. "I quit working at McDonalds, at age 15, because they kept complaining about my singing while I flipped the burgers." Carden says. "I have a radio that constantly plays in my head and puts a song in my heart."

During Ron's first enlisted tour as a Combat Medic, he was selected to the All Army Soldier Show and performed all over the globe. The show included an original song of his. Just a Private First Class back then he used singing as a way to make ends meet for he and his wife. "I remember going to karaoke contests to supplement our income." "It was fun, but we still needed the money" he says.

As Ron moved from assignment to assignment, he has continued to shine at his new duty stations. While in Hawaii at Schofield Barracks, he competed and won 3 times on *Hawaiian Stars*, a local, American Idol-type television show. Soon after his arrival at HQ, US Army Recruiting Command, his then Director, COL Berthold, told the staff that she wanted to win the very competitive annual Christmas Door Prize. Every year departments decorate their doors and include some sort of skit or performance to win the revered prize. CPT Carden immediately knew what it would take and decorated the door in a 1950s Christmas theme. The staff dressed in 50's attire and backed him up as he

impersonated Elvis singing and playing guitar to Blue Christmas. He had changed the words to sing about a recruiter who had missed his mission. They won 1st place. The very next year, CPT Carden played ukulele and designed a Hawaiian theme to win for the 2nd year in a row. *"It's always great when I can do something like this at work that makes people smile and feel good, especially during the holidays."*

Recently CPT Carden was in the spotlight again. On 30 June 2004 there was standing room only. It was the night of the Fast Track to Fame finals at Fort Knox Kentucky. More than 300 contestants had been narrowed down to 38 semi-finalists. They competed for the top 12 spots of which 4 winners were announced. Warner Brothers TV cameras filmed the event for future national air in October. The top 4 contestants won a video broadcast on local WB TV (WDRB) and National WB TV, a personal video (VHS & DVD) of performance, and a letter indicating potential from Sonic Records. CPT Carden won a top 4 position and had a blast doing it. WB television is expected to air the new Fast Track to Fame show starting in August. Although Carden appreciates placing in competitions, he balances out the competitive side with reality. *"Winning is great, but it's not all about the win, I get more enjoyment out of doing well and truly entertaining folks, it's the reaction I get from someone that enjoys the song I'm singing that is special to me."*



Maj. Gen. Michael D. Rochelle (right), Commanding General, US Army Recruiting Command presenting award to CPT Ron Carden, MPAS, PA-C